

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLACK SHEEP," "WRECKED IN
PORT," &c. &c.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER X. TRACKED.

THE startling news which Mrs. Pickering conveyed to Mr. Drage seemed literally to take away his breath. He pressed one hand on his heart and leaned his head on the other, which was supported by the writing-table at which he was seated. He remained in this position for a few moments, until the spasm had passed away. When he raised his head his voice was scarcely under his command as he said:

"This is very dreadful news! Is it perfectly to be relied on?"

"I have already given you my authority. I came upon it by the merest accident last night as I was reading aloud to Sir Geoffry. I have taken a copy of the paragraph, and it is there." She laid the paper on the desk before him. He took it up and read it attentively. Then he said:

"It is frank enough, certainly, and prints the names plainly, and in full. If you have any doubt as to its authenticity, I think we can make ourselves certain on that point through my father."

"Your father, Mr. Drage?"

"Yes. He is, as you know, somewhat potential in the City, where"—pointing to the paper—"both the late husband of the lady and your—and Mr. Vane seem to have been engaged. If I were to write to my father he could doubtless make inquiries, and ascertain if the news herein contained is false or true."

"I have little doubt of its truth," said Madge, "but still less of the identity of the person spoken of with my husband. Accepting this, what am I to do?"

"You must take action of some kind, Mrs. Pickering," said Mr. Drage, nervously. "It would be impossible for you to remain quiet, now that you have been placed in possession of this information."

"I wish the wretched newspaper had never come into the place," cried Madge. "I was living quietly enough, and should have continued to do so, no matter what had happened in the outer world, so long as the knowledge of it was kept from me. What benefit has my learning this news been to me, or to any one? It has completely destroyed the peace of mind which I have been so long in acquiring; and, after all, what good can I do? what harm can I prevent?"

"You must, indeed, have been much upset," said the rector, gravely, "for I should scarcely recognise that remark as coming from one who, in general, thinks so little of herself, and so much of her opportunities of serving her fellow-creatures. Surely you must perceive that you may now be the means of saving this lady from an illegal marriage, and from a life of consequent misery."

"Does one necessarily follow the other?" asked Madge, bitterly. "Mine was a legal marriage, and yet it can scarcely be said to have been a happy one. This woman has been married before, and has had experience of the world. She will know how to humour her husband, and besides, too, she has wealth. I don't think that Philip Vane, having much of his own way, and plenty of money at his command, would be an ineligible companion for such a person. I am by no means prepared to allow that there must necessarily be even the usual amount of married misery in such a union."

The scarlet spot stood out brightly in the rector's cheeks, and he moved forward in

his chair as though about to speak. He managed, however, to check the threatened outburst of his wrath, and said, quietly:

"You are plainly not yourself this morning, Mrs. Pickering; you are the last person in whom I should have expected to find an apologist for outraging a law made both by God and man. I scarcely think we can discuss the matter while you are in this spirit; it would be better for you to allow me to call upon you in a day or two, when the effect of the news which you have thus suddenly learned has somewhat subsided."

There was nothing cruel in this remark, but the words were the harshest which, since his acquaintance with Madge, the rector had ever used towards her; and his manner was marked by a sternness which she had never previously noticed in him.

"I was wrong," she said, frankly, "and you are right in thus reproving me; but I suppose even you will allow that my fate just now is somewhat hard? I have described to you what effect this announcement had upon me when I first saw it last night; I was stupefied. An hour afterwards, when I read it at my leisure, and pondered over it, I was mad, and could have killed Philip Vane had he crossed my path. At that moment I could have killed this woman who is to be his wife! Now, I wish to kill no one, except," she added, with a faint smile, "perhaps, the newspaper-man, whose paragraph has so upset me, and my real desire would be to leave things exactly as they are, to fall into such channels as chance may mark out for them, and to pursue the even tenour of my way."

"That is impossible now, Mrs. Pickering," said the rector, speaking in his usual soft tone and trustful manner. "It is not for us to inquire why you, the person most interested in hearing of this news, should—accidentally, apparently—have had it brought before you. That it was with some wise purpose, I do not doubt, though I cannot say positively; but this I can say positively, that being aware of it, it is your duty to prevent the commission of this crime."

"That can only be done effectually by my seeing this—this lady, and acquainting her with the exact position in which I stand towards the man she is about to marry."

"That I think should be your last resource," said Mr. Drage, after a pause. "Under the old rules of woodcraft, it was not considered a part of sport to give any law to the fox, who might be 'trapped and slain' whenever he could be caught; and no doubt the majority of the world would

class Mr. Vane in this category. But situated as you are with him, it is only fair that, even at this juncture, he should experience better treatment at your hands; and it will be right, I think, that in the first place you should let him know your acquaintance with his project, and your determination to thwart it."

"That would involve my seeing him?" asked Madge.

"Unquestionably," replied the rector; "it is not a matter that could be managed by deputy."

"I could not do that," said Madge, shuddering. "I could not possibly face him alone again."

"You need not be alone," said Mr. Drage; "I will accompany you very willingly if you wish it. As your parish priest and intimate friend, the repository of your confidence, I could go with you on this errand, and——"

"It would be impossible, under any circumstances," cried Madge; "I could not see him again—I will not do it."

"You must," said Mr. Drage, firmly. "It is a matter of duty, and when I have said that to you, I know I need say no more."

There must have been something in this tall, ungainly, fragile man—perhaps it was the earnestness of his manner, or the knowledge on the part of those who heard him, that, in all sincerity, he practised what he preached—which commanded obedience.

After his last words, Madge said, simply, "Very well, I will do as you suggest."

And he knew that his advice would be followed to the letter.

"I need not tell you that you are acting rightly," he said; "you have an intuitive knowledge of it."

"I will do as you advise me," she replied; "but there is one thing which we have not yet settled. How and where am I to find Mr. Philip Vane?"

"I do not imagine there will be much difficulty in tracing him," said the rector. "I will, with your permission, enclose a copy of that paragraph to my father, and, without giving him any reasons, will ask him to find out for me whether the news contained in it is true, and who and what are the persons whose affairs are therein freely discussed. I will ask him to find out what is Mr. Vane's City status, and what his private address."

"You are determined to leave me no loophole," said Madge, with another attempt at a smile.

"Determined," said Mr. Drage, taking her hand. "I have seen you under a great

many phases, and I want you to be successful in this as in all the others."

So the letter was written to the rector's father, and in the interval between its despatch and the receipt of the reply, Madge endeavoured to school herself for the task which she had undertaken to execute. It would be a difficult one she knew right well, but she knew also that her best chance of going through with it successfully was to cultivate the callousness with which for so long a time she had regarded Philip Vane and his affairs, and from which she had only been roused by the sudden shock of the news concerning him. The indignation roused by that news, the strange feeling of jealousy that any one should occupy what was her lawful position, the curious desire to claim that position, which she had long since calmly yielded up, directly she saw it about to be taken by another, all these disturbing sensations had passed away and left her calm and equal-minded as she had been for months, for years previously. Whether or not her equanimity would desert her when she saw her husband face to face, she could not say. She endeavoured to rehearse in her mind all that might probably take place on the occasion of their meeting; all the sneers and brutalities which he would hurl at her, when he heard the object of her visit, and after a certain amount of preparation, she conducted herself, so far as the rehearsal was concerned, to her entire satisfaction.

In about a week's time she received a letter from Mr. Drage, saying that his father's reply had arrived, and he would be glad to see her at the rectory on the first convenient opportunity.

That same day she took occasion to go into town, and found the rector expecting her. When the servant who announced her had retired, Mr. Drage said, with a grave smile:

"You will be more pleased than I am myself with a certain portion of the news which I have to announce to you. My father placed my letter in the hands of a confidential clerk who has been with him for years, and he it is who replies to my inquiries. I will read what he says."

The rector took up a letter lying on the desk before him, and read as follows:

"There would seem to be no doubt about the bona fides of the newspaper paragraph, copy of which was forwarded by you. Have traced paragraph from Anglo-Indian paper (where it was expanded by addition of last lines) to Fashionable Tatler,

where it originally appeared, and have seen receipt for three and six, signed by Rumbold, described as 'hall porter in nobleman's family,' as payment for it. Andreas Bendixen died 5th of June, 1858. Personal property sworn under one hundred and thirty thousand pounds; clear half to widow, other half divided among three brothers, but to remain in the business for ten years. Mrs. Bendixen resides 204, Harley-street. Sent there—out of town—servant declined to give address. Mr. Philip Vane, general manager, Terra del Fuegos Mining Company, and on various other boards of direction. Private residence, Z 20, the Albany. Sent to both places—said to be out of town. Messenger saw clerks in the City—valet at Albany. Both declined to give Mr. V.'s address, professing not to know it."

"Which portion of this communication is to please me more than it does you?" asked Madge, as he laid down the paper.

"That which states that Mr. Vane's present whereabouts cannot be ascertained," said the rector. "You seemed so averse to meeting him the last time we talked the matter over, that I imagined you would have been glad of the excuse thus afforded you."

"On the contrary," said Madge; "the more I have thought of the matter the more I have seen it from your point of view, and the more am I convinced of the necessity of my taking action in it."

"That necessity seems to me more than ever urgent," said the rector. "Neither of these people are to be found in London; both are simultaneously away from town, and the address of neither can be ascertained. Had not the insertion of that paragraph shown that they evidently courted publicity, I should imagine they had gone away to be married quietly from some friend's house in the country, and to escape from the usual fuss and worry of a fashionable wedding. Even as it is, if we want to prevent this man from carrying his atrocious scheme into operation, I do not think we have any time to lose."

"What more can we do?" asked Madge.

"I am afraid nothing," said the rector, shrugging his shoulders. "I have written to my father's head clerk to renew the inquiries at Mr. Vane's address from day to day, and to let it be known that an important communication awaits him."

So Madge returned home beaten, and dispirited at her failure. The next morning brought a letter from Rose. It ran thus:

DEAREST MADGE,—What they call the London season is over now, and the work at the office has become very much slacker, so the superintendent says I can have my fortnight's holiday now if I like, and I think I should like very much indeed, for the weather is dreadfully hot, and I have been working very hard all the summer, and begin to feel that I want a change. So I write to ask if you can get a holiday at the same time, Madge, and then we might go to some seaside place together, and enjoy ourselves. That would be nicest of all; but if you cannot manage to get away from your duties, I might come down to Springside and go into our old lodging, or one like it, and you could come to see me whenever you were disengaged. If you told Sir Geoffrey Heriot your sister were coming down, I don't suppose that he would make any objection to your being a great deal with me, as he seems, from all you say of him, to be a very kind old man.

For I must see you somewhere, Madge, I must, indeed. I know that no amount of fresh air or change of scene would do me half as much good as a long talk with you, and I shall only fret and worry myself until I have it.

Can you imagine what it is all about, Madge? You are so quick and clever, that I dare say you have guessed already, and indeed I should not be surprised if my previous letters had been filled with no other subject, as I always write to you exactly what I think, and I have scarcely thought about anything else for months. Of course, Madge, I mean Mr. Gerald Hardinge! He has been very kind to me, and I have seen a great deal of him lately; he has lent me plenty of books, and some of his drawings to copy; and the other evening, when I incautiously said something about missing that old piano, which we used to thump and strum away on at Miss Cave's lodgings, Mr. Hardinge asked if I would permit him to hire another for me. I could not sanction this, of course, and said no; but he insisted so strongly, that I had to invent a little story, and tell him that Mrs. Bland would not allow any piano practice in her house. That seemed to satisfy him, for he said Mrs. Bland was a most respectable woman, and I was most happily placed under her charge; and he thought it would be highly inexpedient for me to go to any other lodging. "Highly inexpedient" were the words he used, looking as grave as a judge all the time; for he is awfully proper and decorous, though,

at the same time, he is awfully nice. I can see you raise your eyebrows in astonishment when you read what I am now going to tell you. That frequently during these long summer evenings I have walked with him in Kensington Gardens, and that we have talked for hours and hours together, and that he has never said one word of you. I cannot tell exactly what it is he talks about; I often try to think of it after we have parted, and I am at home again alone, but I never can recollect it exactly; I only know that he talks very cleverly and very charmingly, and I am only required to say a word here and there.

Oh, Madge, it is no use my beating about the bush any longer, and attempting to deceive you; I have read over what I have just written, and I might as well put in so many words what you already know, that I am madly in love with Gerald, and think there is no one like him in the world. Don't think this a sudden fit of frenzy, and that I have gone mad; it has been growing and growing ever so long, ever since we were at Wexeter together, and he used to give me drawing lessons.

Mind, Madge, he does not make love to me—at least, I mean to say, exactly make love; he is far too honourable to attempt to take the slightest advantage of my position, and he has never said anything to me which you might not have heard. I mean, of course, anything so far as honour is concerned; but his manner is so kind and gentle, and he is so patient with my ignorance and my folly; so careful to prevent its ever occurring to me that I am not moving in his sphere, or that there is any difference in our rank in life, and so handsome—you have no idea, Madge, what he is like now—that I cannot help loving him immensely.

I do not know that I should have taken even you into confidence, Madge, if it could have gone on in this way, but I am sufficiently sensible to know that it cannot. The summer evenings are at an end now, and there will be no more long walks, and then all my chances of seeing Gerald, save for a few moments at a time, are over; and then I sometimes think that if I were to give up seeing him it would kill me, and then I know I must give it up, and then I think I should go mad, only I find comfort in the remembrances of your strong, sound sense, and the certainty that you will advise me for the best; and remember, dear, whatever has to be done, and whatever is to be said to Gerald about it, you must say it for me, because I could never—but we

will talk this all over when I come down to see you.

Oh, by the way, you recollect my writing to you some time ago of Gerald telling me about an old lady whom he wished me to call upon, but she was ill at the time. She is always ill, it appears, and as Gerald wished her very much to see me I walked there with him the other evening. She lives in a fashionable part of the town, in a tiny little mite of a house, exquisitely furnished, and looking on to Hyde Park; she has been a handsome woman, and was so beautifully dressed, just in good taste, you know, for an invalid, who is always compelled to lie on a sofa. She tried to be very polite, but she is of the old C-A-T order, looking me up and down, and through and through, and "Miss Pierreponted" me whenever she addressed me. When I rose to go, I almost expected her to ring and order "the young person to be shown out." Gerald looked annoyed, and I rather think the introduction was a failure. He has not said much about it since, only that Mrs. Entwistle (that's her funny old name) was peculiar, and that allowances must be made for her as an invalid, &c.

Now, dearest Madge, write to me at once, and tell me what we shall do about meeting; and don't fret yourself about what I have told you, for it is all perfectly right, and I will be entirely guided by your advice.

Your loving

ROSE.

P.S.—I had almost forgotten to tell you a curious thing which happened yesterday. We have a new clerk at the counter, and it appears he refused to take a message because it was written in cipher; the person delivering it insisted on its being forwarded, and as he refused to go away, higher authority was appealed to, and I was sent for. Directly I set eyes upon the man, who wished the telegram forwarded, I recognised him at once. Don't you recollect, just a short time before the close of the season at Wexeter, I came one morning to fetch you after rehearsal, and, as we walked away from the theatre, we were followed for a long distance by a short stout man, whose hands we noticed were covered with blazing diamond rings, and who kept on dogging our footsteps, to my great amusement? But you were in a tremendous rage about it, and at last you stopped dead, and turning round, looked the man up and down as though you could have killed and eaten him on the spot, and then he, in a far more gentlemanly manner

than we either of us could have given him credit for, raised his hat and went away.

There stood the very man at our counter; I recognised him in an instant; saw the whole scene before me. Of course he didn't recognise, in the superintendent of the telegraph office, the sister and companion of the celebrated actress, Miss M. P. I inquired into the matter, told him that his message could be forwarded, and he retired, taking off his hat to me, exactly as he had taken it off to you on the before-named memorable occasion.

I wonder who he is; he looked very like a member of the profession, or perhaps more in the style of the manager of that American circus which came to one of the towns—I forget which—where you were acting when I was with you. His message was in cipher, and there is therefore nothing in it which led to his identification; it is a funny message, I enclose you a copy of it.

"I enclose you a copy of it," repeated Madge, turning over the paper, "and there is nothing enclosed; that's just like Rose. Ah, what is this?" and she stooped down to pick up a piece of paper lying on the ground at her feet. It was the usual printed form of a telegraph message. Madge noticed that it was headed "copy," that it was filled up in Rose's handwriting, and that it was lengthy, but she read nothing beyond the first two lines, which ran thus:

"D. L. B., London, to Philip Vane, Esq., care of P. Kaulbach, Esq., Hollycombe, Sandown, Isle of Wight."

Madge started, doubting whether she had read aright; she re-read the address carefully, placed the paper in her pocket, and started off at once for the rectory.

She found Mr. Drage at home, and read aloud to him the text of Rose's letter; she did not show him the copy of the telegram, but she repeated exactly the address it contained. There was no need for her to refer to the written document, every word of that address was burning in her memory, as though each had been emblazoned in letters of fire.

"This is, to say the least of it, very lucky," said Mr. Drage, "for I will use that phrase in preference to any more serious one, which might seem to imply especial interposition on our behalf. Have you thought of what you will do now?"

"I have," said Madge. "I will make my way at once to the place where Philip Vane is staying, and confront him. I am

sufficient woman of business to have consulted Bradshaw while waiting for you, and I have already arranged my route; I find that I can go across country to Yeovil, sleep there this evening, and proceed to-morrow to Southampton, whence I can cross to the Isle of Wight."

"May I not accompany you?" said Mr. Drage.

"No," said Madge, "I think it will be better that I should go alone: not that I think either of us need have the smallest fear of what the world might say about such a proceeding, but I am sure that my chance of—well, I suppose I may say, of escaping with my life from my husband, will be greater if he imagines I have acted entirely on my own promptings in this affair."

"The argument you have used is scarcely one which should induce me to give way to you," said Mr. Drage; "however, since you are determined, go, and God speed you! Sir Geoffry will be perfectly prepared to hear you wish for a few days' change; I have taken care of that."

On the second evening after her leaving Wheatcroft, Madge Pierrepont rang the bell of a large and handsome one-storied villa, standing in a lovely garden, and overlooking Sandown Bay. The hall-door was open, and several servants were flitting about, busily engaged removing the dinner. One of these advanced towards her.

"Is Mr. Philip Vane within?"

The servant glanced first at her and then at the fly which had brought her from the hotel, then he was reassured.

"Mr. Vane is staying in the house, ma'am," he replied.

"I wish to speak with him."

"Certainly, ma'am," said the man, showing the way into a small room. "Will you walk into the study. Who shall I say wishes to see Mr. Vane?"

"Say Mrs. Vane, if you please," said Madge, firmly.

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

A BILL OF THE PLAY.

ARE there, now-a-days, any collectors of playbills? In the catalogues of second-hand booksellers are occasionally to be found such entries as: "Playbills of the Theatre Royal Bath, 1807 to 1812;" or "Hull Theatre Royal—various bills of performances between 1815 and 1850;" or "Covent Garden Theatre—variety of old bills of the last century pasted in a

volume;" yet these evidences of the care and diligence of past collectors would not seem to obtain much appreciation in the present. The old treasures can generally be purchased at a very moderate outlay. Still if scarceness is an element of value, these things should be precious. It is in the nature of such ephemera of the printing press to live their short hour, and disappear with exceeding suddenness. They may be originally issued in hundreds or even in thousands; but once gone they are gone for ever. Relative to such matters there is an energy of destruction that keeps pace with the industry of production. The demands of "waste" must be met: fires must be lighted. So away go the loose papers—sheets and pamphlets of the minute. They have served their turn, and there is an end of them. Hence the difficulty of obtaining, when needed, a copy of a newspaper of old date, or the guide-book or programme of a departed entertainment, or the catalogue of a past auction of books or pictures. It has been noted that, notwithstanding the enormous circulation it enjoyed, the catalogue of our Great Exhibition of a score of years ago is already a somewhat rare volume. Complete sets of the catalogues of the Royal Academy's century of exhibitions are possessed by very few. And of playbills of the English stage from the Restoration down to the present time, although the British Museum can certainly boast a rich collection, yet this is disfigured here and there by gaps and deficiencies which cannot now possibly be supplied.

The playbill is an ancient thing. Mr. Payne Collier states that the practice of printing information as to the time, place, and nature of the performances to be presented by the players was certainly common prior to the year 1563. John Northbrooke, in his treatise against theatrical performers, published about 1579, says: "They use to set up their bills upon posts some certain days before to admonish people to make resort to their theatres." The old plays make frequent reference to this posting of the playbills. Thus in the induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, 1599, Tragedy whips Comedy from the stage, crying:

*Tis you have kept the theatre so long
Painted in playbills upon every post,
While I am scorned of the multitude.

Taylor, the water poet, in his *Wit and Mirth*, records the story of Field the actor's riding rapidly up Fleet-street, and being stopped by a gentleman with an inquiry as to the

play that was to be played that night. Field, "being angry to be stayed upon so frivolous a demand, answered, that he might see what play was to be played upon every post. 'I cry you mercy,' said the gentleman. 'I took you for a post, you rode so fast.'"

It is strange to find that the right of printing playbills was originally monopolised by the Stationers' Company. At a later period, however, the privilege was assumed and exercised by the crown. In 1620, James the First granted a patent to Roger Wood and Thomas Symcocke for the sole printing, among other things, of "all bills for playes, pastimes, shewes, challenges, prizes, or sportes whatsoever." It was not until after the Restoration that the playbills contained a list of the dramatis personæ, or of the names of the actors. But it had been usual, apparently, with the title of the drama, to supply the name of its author and its description as a tragedy or comedy. Shirley, in the prologue to his *Cardinal*, apologises for calling it only a "play" in the bill:

Think what you please, we call it but a "play:"
Whether the comic muse, or lady's love,
Romance or direful tragedy it prove,
The bill determines not.

From a later passage in the same prologue Mr. Collier judges that the titles of tragedies were usually printed, for the sake of distinction, in red ink:

—and you would be
Persuaded I would have't a comedy
For all the purple in the name.

There is probably no playbill extant of an earlier date than 1663. About this time, in the case of a new play, it was usual to state in the bill that it had been "never acted before."

In the earliest days of the stage, before the invention of printing, the announcement that theatrical performances were about to be exhibited was made by sound of trumpet, much after the manner of modern strollers and showmen at fairs and street-corners. Indeed, long after playbills had become common, this musical advertisement was still requisite for the due information of the unlettered patrons of the stage. In certain towns the musicians were long looked upon as the indispensable heralds of the actors. Tate Wilkinson, writing in 1790, records that a custom obtained at Norwich, "and if abolished it has not been many years," of proclaiming in every street with drum and trumpet the performances to be presented at the theatre in the evening. A like practice also prevailed at Grantham. To the

Lincolnshire company of players, however, this musical preface to their efforts seemed objectionable and derogatory, and they determined, on one of their visits to the town, to dispense with the old-established sounds. But the reform resulted in empty benches. Thereupon the "revered, well-remembered, and beloved Marquis of Granby" sent for the manager of the troop, and thus addressed him: "Mr. Manager, I like a play. I like a player, and I shall be glad to serve you. But, my good friend, why are you all so offended at and averse to the noble sound of a drum? I like it, and all the inhabitants like it. Put my name on your playbill, provided you drum, but not otherwise. Try the effect on to-morrow night; if then you are as thinly attended as you have lately been, shut up your playhouse at once; but if it succeeds drum away!" The players withdrew their opposition and followed the counsels of the marquis. The musical prelude was again heard in the streets of Grantham, and crowded houses were obtained. The company enjoyed a prosperous season, and left the town in great credit. "And I am told," adds Wilkinson, "the custom is continued at Grantham to this day."

An early instance of the explanatory address, signed by the dramatist or manager, which so frequently accompanies the modern playbill, is to be found in the fly-sheet issued by Dryden in 1665. The poet thought it expedient in this way to inform the audience that his tragedy of the *Indian Emperor* was to be regarded as a sequel to a former work, the *Indian Queen*, which he had written in conjunction with his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. The handbill excited some amusement, by reason of its novelty, for in itself it was but a simple and useful intimation. In ridicule of this proceeding, Bayes, the hero of the Duke of Buckingham's burlesque, the *Rehearsal*, is made to say: "I have printed above a hundred sheets of paper to insinuate the plot into the boxes."

Chetwood, who had been twenty years prompter at Drury Lane, and published a *History of the Stage* in 1749, describes a difficulty that had arisen in regard to printing the playbills. Of old the lists of characters had been set forth according to the books of the plays, without regard to the merits of the performers. "As, for example, in *Macbeth*, Duncan, King of Scotland, appeared first in the bill, though acted by an insignificant person, and so every other actor appeared according to his dramatic dignity, all of the same sized

letter. But latterly, I can assure my readers, I have found it a difficult task to please some ladies as well as gentlemen, because I could not find letters large enough to please them; and some were so fond of elbow room that they would have shoved everybody out but themselves, as if one person was to do all, and have the merit of all, like generals of an army." Garrick seems to have been the first actor honoured by capital letters of extra size in the playbills. The Connoisseur, in 1754, says: "The writer of the playbills deals out his capitals in so just a proportion that you may tell the salary of each actor by the size of the letter in which his name is printed. When the present manager of Drury Lane first came on the stage a new set of types, two inches long, were cast on purpose to do honour to his extraordinary merit." These distinctions in the matter of printing occasioned endless jealousies among the actors. Macklin made it an express charge against his manager, Sheridan, the actor, that he was accustomed to print his own name in larger type than was permitted the other performers. Kean threatened to throw up his engagement at Drury Lane on account of his name having been printed in capitals of a smaller size than usual. His engagement of 1818 contained a condition, "and also that his name shall be continued in the bills of performance in the same manner as it is at present," viz., large letters. On the other hand, Dowton, the comedian, greatly objected to having his name thus particularised, and expostulated with Elliston, his manager, on the subject. "I am sorry you have done this," he wrote. "You know well what I mean. This cursed quackery. These big letters. There is a want of respectability about it, or rather a notoriety, which gives one the feeling of an absconded felon, against whom a hue and cry is made public. Or if there be really any advantage in it, why should I, or any single individual, take it over the rest of our brethren? But it has a nasty disreputable look, and I have fancied the whole day the finger of the town pointed at me, as much as to say, 'That is he! Now for the reward!' Leave this expedient to the police officers, or to those who have a taste for it. I have none."

O'Keeffe relates that once when an itinerant showman brought over to Dublin a trained monkey of great acquirements, Mossop engaged the animal at a large salary to appear for a limited num-

ber of nights at his theatre. Mossop's name in the playbill was always in a type nearly two inches long, the rest of the performers' names being in very small letters. But to the monkey were devoted capitals of equal size to Mossop's; so that, greatly to the amusement of the public, on the playbills pasted about the town, nothing could be distinguished but the words, MOSSOP, MONKEY. Under John Kemble's management, "for his greater ease and the quiet of the theatre," letters of unreasonable size were abandoned, and the playbills were printed after an amended and more modest pattern.

With the rise and growth of the press came the expediency of advertising the performances of the theatres in the columns of the newspapers. To the modern manager advertisements are a very formidable expense. The methods he is compelled to resort to in order to bring his plays and players well under the notice of the public, involve a serious charge upon his receipts. But of old the case was precisely the reverse. The theatres were strong, the newspapers were weak. So far from the manager paying money for the insertion of his advertisements in the journals, he absolutely received profits on this account. The press then suffered under severe restrictions, and was most jealously regarded by the governing powers; leading articles were as yet unknown; the printing of parliamentary debates was strictly prohibited; foreign intelligence was scarcely obtainable; of home news there was little stirring that could with safety be promulgated. So that the proceedings of the theatres became of real importance to the newspaper proprietor, and it was worth his while to pay considerable sums for early information in this respect. Moreover, in those days, not merely by reason of its own merits, but because of the absence of competing attractions and other sources of entertainment, the stage was much more than at present an object of general regard. In Andrews's History of British Journals it is recorded, on the authority of the ledger of Henry Woodfall, the publisher of the Public Advertiser: "The theatres are a great expense to the papers. Amongst the items of payment are, playhouses one hundred pounds. Drury Lane advertisements, sixty-four pounds eight shillings and sixpence, Covent Garden, ditto, sixty-six pounds eleven shillings. The papers paid two hundred pounds a year to each theatre for the accounts of new plays, and

would reward the messenger with a shilling or half a crown who brought them the first copy of a playbill." In 1721, the following announcement appeared in the *Daily Post*: "The managers of Drury Lane think it proper to give notice that advertisements of their plays, by their authority, are published only in this paper and the *Daily Courant*, and that the publishers of all other papers who insert advertisements of the same plays, can do it only by some surreptitious intelligence or hearsay, which frequently leads them to commit gross errors, as, mentioning one play for another, falsely representing the parts, &c., to the misinformation of the town, and the great detriment of the said theatre." And the *Public Advertiser* of January the 1st, 1765, contains a notice: "To prevent any mistake in future in advertising the plays and entertainments of Drury Lane Theatre, the managers think it proper to declare that the playbills are inserted by their direction in this paper only." It is clear that the science of advertising was but dimly understood at this date. Even the shopkeepers then paid for the privilege of exhibiting bills in their windows, whereas now they require to be rewarded for all exertions of this kind, by, at any rate, free admissions to the entertainments advertised, if not by a specific payment of money. The exact date when the managers began to pay instead of receive on the score of their advertisements, is hardly to be ascertained. Geneste, in his laborious *History of the Stage*, says obscurely of the year 1745: "At this time the plays were advertised at three shillings and sixpence each night or advertisement in the *General Advertiser*." It may be that the adverse systems went on together for some time. The managers may have paid certain journals for the regular insertion of advertisements, and received payment from less favoured or less influential newspapers for theatrical news or information.

One of Charles Lamb's most pleasant papers arose from "the casual sight of an old playbill which I picked up the other day; I know not by what chance it was preserved so long." It was but two-and-thirty years old, however, and presented the cast of parts in *Twelfth Night* at Old Drury Lane Theatre, destroyed by fire in 1809. Lamb's delight in the stage needs not to be again referred to. "There is something very touching in these old remembrances," he writes. "They make

us think how we once used to read a playbill, not as now peradventure singling out a favourite performer and casting a negligent eye over the rest; but spelling out every name down to the very mutes and servants of the scene; when it was a matter of no small moment to us whether Whitfield or Packer took the part of Fabian; when Benson, and Burton, and Phillimore—names of small account—had an importance beyond what we can be content to attribute now to the time's best actors." The fond industry with which a youthful devotee of the theatre studies the playbills could hardly be more happily indicated than in this extract.

Mention of Old Drury Lane and its burning bring us naturally to the admirable "story of the flying playbill," contained in the parody of Crabbe, perhaps the most perfect specimen in that unique collection of parodies, *Rejected Addresses*. The verses by the pseudo-Crabbe include the following lines:

Perchance while pit and gallery cry "Hats off!"
And awed consumption checks his chided cough,
Some giggling daughter of the Queen of Love
Drops, rest of pin, her playbill from above;
Like Icarus, while laughing galleries clap,
Soars, ducks, and dives in air the printed scrap;
But, wiser far than he, combustion fears;
And, as it flies, eludes the chandeliers;
Till, sinking gradual, with repeated twirl,
It settles, curling, on a fiddler's curl,
Who from his powdered pate the intruder strikes,
And, for mere malice, sticks it on the spikes.

"The story of the flying playbill," says the mock-preface, "is calculated to expose a practice, much too common, of pinning playbills to the cushions insecurely, and frequently, I fear, not pinning them at all. If these lines save one playbill only from the fate I have recorded, I shall not deem my labour ill employed."

Modern playbills may be described as of two classes, in-door and out-of-door. The latter are known also as "posters," and may thus manifest their connexion with the early method of "setting up playbills upon posts." Shakespeare's audiences were not supplied each with handbills as our present playgoers are; such of them as could read were probably content to derive all the information they needed from the notices affixed to the doors of the theatre, or otherwise publicly exhibited. Of late years the venders of playbills who were wont urgently to pursue every vehicle that seemed to them bound to the theatre, in the hope of disposing of their wares, have greatly diminished in numbers, if they have not wholly disappeared. Many managers have

forbidden altogether the sale of bills outside the doors of their establishments. The in-door programmes are again divided into two kinds. To the lower priced portions of the houses an inferior bill is devoted; a folio sheet of thin paper heavily laden and strongly odorous with printers' ink. Visitors to the more expensive seats are now supplied with a scented bill of octavo size, which is generally, in addition, the means of advertising the goods and inventions of an individual perfumer. Attempts to follow Parisian example, and to make the playbill at once a vehicle for general advertisements and a source of amusing information upon theatrical subjects, have been ventured here occasionally, but without decided success. From time to time papers started with this object, under such titles as the *Opera Glass*, the *Curtain*, the *Drop Scene*, &c., have appeared, but they have failed to secure a sufficiency of patronage. The playgoer's openness to receive impressions or information of any kind by way of employment during the intervals of representation, have not been unperceived by the advertiser, however, and now and then, as a result, a monstrosity called an "advertising curtain," has disfigured the stage. Some new development of the playbill in this direction may be in store for us in the future. The difficulty lies, perhaps, in the gilding of the pill. Advertisements by themselves are not very attractive reading, and a mixed audience cannot safely be credited with a ruling appetite merely for dramatic intelligence.

A TRYST.

HER red-gold locks by broad blue ribbons bound,
Fell o'er her graceful shoulders—her low voice
Was as the south wind mid the summer leaves,
Making melodious music: Love's bright spell
Lay in the tangled mazes of her hair,
Lurked in her sunny eyes: her red lips held
Such living pearls, as from the Indian deep
Ne'er diver brought—a costly merchandise,
To gem a monarch's crown.

Finger-on-lip, .
Dewy-eyed eve crept onward: and the star,
The silver spark, that glitters in the west,
Even mid the roseate cloud-waves that enshroud
The parting sun-god's golden chariot wheels,
Rose o'er the belt of pines, whose sable fronds
Showed black and pluméd, 'neath the mellow light
Of the young crescent-orb.

And then a maid,
Brushing the glittering dew-drops with her feet
From off the lawn, stole to the withered oak,
That skirts the garden-fence: Aureola!
There didst thou stand, with quickly-beating heart,
Thy colour heightened, though no eye to see,
Waiting for him—who came not. Ah, ah me!
Sweetling! too oft the thistle-down hath weight
Compared with man's false oaths.

Slowly and sad,
Homeward again she turned: The white owl wailed,

The nightingale, upon the lilac-bush,
Sang "Love, O buried Love!" and o'er the path,
The showering rose-leaves, to Aureola,
Seemed omens of her "fate." Sudden she paused:
Then with a backward impulse, sought again
The withered trysting-tree: two youthful loves
Hung on that precious moment—and two lives!

What is yon shadow on the gravelled path?
What is yon figure, leaning 'gainst the oak?
Back to the maiden's cheek the life-blood glows.
Had she gone homewards, she had missed her "fate;"
What happy impulse moved her to return?
Love, 'twas *thine* inspiration—he is here!

A PENNY READING AT MOPETOWN.

MOPETOWN—and some perverse fate seems to thrust me on the place more frequently every year—after many visits, seems to me to be the very ignis fatuus of the entertainers. They know that no one in the place wants to be entertained, still less to pay for being entertained; yet some horrid infatuation seems to draw them there, offering their dismal buzzings, and invariably burning their wings. Suddenly the amateurs of the place caught the mania. Why should not something be done to amuse the Mopetownians? Was it not churlish, keeping all these delightful gifts to themselves? When a few words will rescue misery out of its distress, as Mr. Sterne says of the cab, the man that could grudge them must be a mean curmudgeon indeed. It was some such noble and unselfish principle that led to the Mopetown Penny Readings. It was all a spectacle of the purest charity and self-sacrifice, and the furnishers of the show devoted themselves for the good of the famished and semi-barbarous natives of the place.

To my surprise I found that the admission charges to these so-called Penny Readings were two shillings, one shilling, sixpence, threepence; while the "title-admission," as it might be called, was too contemptible to be quoted at all in the bills.

"And do you mean to tell me," I said, indignantly, to a sort of crab-faced man who sat beside me, "that after calling them Penny Readings, pretending to have a graduated scale of charges for admission—"

"See here," he said, earnestly, "if you mean the admission to these 'ere preserved seats—"

"Reserved!" I mildly uttered.

"Reserved, preserved, or *deserved*, they're seats all the time, I suppose? If the admission to these here was a farthing apiece, they'd only beat up a couple, and they'd be children. The whole thing's *gra-*

toolous. They go out and ram their tickets into everybody's hands: they sweep the streets and lanes. The parson touts among all his folk, the doctor does the same, and so does the attorney. So do all the old women of the parish."

Greatly astonished at these revelations, I asked, "But *why* should they do this? What is the object?"

"It's a mere 'Vanity-shop,' that's the whole truth. Every man, woman, and girl among 'em is panting to show off. They'd pay a mob in the street to stop and listen to 'em. If they could only get the attention given to a Punch and Judy show, they'd be happy: but they can't. *That's* a higher order of thing. Here they come! *That's* Cleaver, the parson's son, who thinks he's got a turn for speaking, and got the whole thing up. Oh! a regular Vanity-shop!"

Mr. Horace Cleaver, I saw from my bill, was "hon. sec.," a smiling, fussy gentleman, who was received with great applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "there is one matter in connexion with the Readin's which I wish to bring before your notice. After much deliberation we have determined to conclude the series a little abruptly; and I have now to announce that there will be *only six more*. The reason for this step has nothing to do with want of support, as was insinuated lately in a certain quarter." (Crab-face nudged me and whispered, "Th' Argus, you know.") "That I brand simply as A CALUMNY!" (Applause.) "On this very night we have had to turn away people from the doors. The truth is, that in about five weeks we shall lose our valued friend who has contributed so much to your amusement, Mr. Hornblower." (All faces turned here, as if the word of command "Eyes left!" had been given, to a corner of the room.) "Business calls Mr. Hornblower to London. Then, again, Miss Weekes, to whose light fingers we are so much indebted, has to leave." (My neighbour repeated to me, with a chuckle, "D'ye hear, light-fingered, is she? *That's* a funny sort of compliment.") "However," said Mr. Cleaver, "having stated so much, I have only to add that Miss Weekes will now perform a solo on the 'pianefort.'"

Mr. Cleaver bowed and retired, then returned, leading out, in rather a hurried and flurried manner, Miss Weekes—a very agitated young virgin—who gave us an abrupt curtsy, and then, squeezing herself

in between the stool and the instrument, scrambled off into the late M. Thalberg's fantasia in Norma. That master, it is acknowledged, generally wrote on rather difficult lines, and Miss Weekes was not equal to the occasion. The young lady's hands sprawled about, leaped, plunged, invariably falling short of the correct note, making out, indeed, something that had a rude outline of the March in Norma, but could not bear investigation for a moment as finished or artistic playing. It was all a musical muddle; but at Mopetown, I understand, we were never very exacting, and if the normal sounds of the instrument were fairly produced, it was considered unreasonable to ask more. When the performance was over, Miss Weekes fled away in a frightened fawn-like manner, disregarding Mr. Cleaver's proffered cavalier-ship.

I now found that Mr. Brook Derrick would read for us the Execution of Montrose, which would be, as a lady behind me said, "a treat." This, of course, referred to the subject matter, whose excellence was ascertained, but the interpretation was, of course, matter of speculation. Suddenly a gloomy and sepulchral gentleman strode out slowly, a kind of stage volume in his hand. He had black hair and a yellow skin, and I noticed took a good deal of time in placing his book after he got it open at the right place, smoothing it in a reflective way, while his eyes roamed gloomily over the audience. I have seen this at other readings, and it is considered the distinguishing "note" of an experienced performer. After the smoothing, going on for some time, had produced (as was intended) a kind of nervous stillness, Mr. Derrick gave out slowly and undertakerly, "The Execution of Mun-tearose!" He had a scornful fashion about his interpretation; never looking at us, always at a remote cornice or ventilator, at which he flashed his eye and defied the bloodthirsty mob. He allowed his eye to kindle as he crouched down, and scowled, and curled his lip, and snarled, and grew husky. He at last cut off the hero's head, looked at us all round with ineffable disgust, closed his volume slowly, and stalked out, bearing it with him. Not one of us liked him: and I think we should have had no objection to have seen him laid personally on the block in lieu of the unhappy Scotch nobleman.

Miss Speedy was announced as the next candidate for our approbation, who was set down to sing a coquettish ballad entitled

Why don't He ask Me? She was a buxom, apparently shy, but in reality forward young person: florid, healthy, and with a mouth that was always hovering on the edge of a grin. She kept her music before her like a tea-tray; her sister was at the instrument, and was I could see unnerved by agitation. The strain referred to a gentleman supposed to be a candidate for the affections of the singer. She described him as a "Robin" who

Comes every day
With something to say,
Which to guess, would not task me,
Then why—
(*Flourish of the piano from the sister.*)
Then why—
(*Flourish ditto.*)
Then why, why don't he ask me?

This was delivered with coyness—a wish to hide her head behind the music, an arch shyness. We of course felt that had we been in the gentleman's position, we should not have hung back in that fashion. Still I think she was more or less "brazen," with a tendency to the more. My neighbour said she "would follow a camp," but this was a coarse reflection on the young lady's character.

Next, Mr. Cleaver came out to say that Mr. Siddons Green had kindly consented to recite for us "Edgar Allan Poe's piece of word-painting, the Bells." There was much applause. Siddons Green, I heard from behind, was a gentleman who either had been on the stage, was on the stage, or was going on the stage, I could not make out which distinctly. Another lady whispered something about "going into the Church," and seemed to perceive no discrepancy between the callings. To my surprise Mr. Siddons Green had nothing of the vault about him; and had indeed rather the young curate air—a tenderness and a plaintiveness. His reading of Mr. Poe's bit of "word-painting" was highly curious. It will be remembered that the piece describes various descriptions of bells with singular power, the first strophe, I think, being devoted to the wedding bells. We listened with pleasure to the melodious lines—

Hear the music of the bells,
Wedding bells,
How they, &c.

He gave the nuptial tone tenderly and sweetly, with a kind of conjugal grace, and when the burden came, he chimed it out:

Bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells, bells,

and began to peal them as if he were a bell-ringer himself. His voice fell into a sing-

song key. Some few tittered behind, but we were all more astonished than amused. The effect was odd. But at the next verse, which dealt with funeral bells, Siddons Green became mortuary, and dead-cart-like. He suddenly turned into a ghoul, and when it came to the burden we seemed to hear the chimes of an adjoining tower:

To the pealing of the bells,
Bee-yulls, beeyulls,
Boolls, boolls, bulls, bulls, bulls,
Boles, BOWLES, BOWLES!

As this extraordinary mimetic representation set in, some Mopetownians began to look wonderingly at each other, then to smile, and at last a wave of tittering began to spread away even to the last benches. Siddons Green looked up with scornful surprise—there are low persons in every audience—and then addressed himself to the final stanza, where I think a house is described as being on fire, and the bells ring violently for the firemen. He described it all vividly, "how they clang, how they bang!" (or in words to that effect) until he came to the burden again, "to the ringing and the swinging" of the

Bells, bells, bells, bells, bells,
Beeyells, beeyells, beeyells,
Bells, bells, bells, &c.

At this effort of campanology we could restrain ourselves no longer, and roared and roared again in hysterical merriment. It was too funny, and the ringer, glaring furiously, closed his book vehemently and walked away indignantly.

When we had recovered from our hilarity, Mr. Cleaver, who never omitted the ceremony of announcement, though we had all bills in our hands, came out to say that "Miss Puxley would now sing the Irish song, Patrick, Asthore." This announcement produced great applause. But looking round, I was struck by the motionless hands and soured faces of a whole family who were sitting behind. There was present on each and all a sort of grim consternation, for which so simple an announcement could scarcely be accountable. It flashed upon me in a second that these must be representatives of the other coquettish female delineator who had put the question, "Why don't he ask me?" Here was an opposition arch creature, and who going to be musically coy and forward alternatively in reference to "Patrick, asthore." The surmise proved to be an exceedingly sagacious one, for there emerged a very bouncing young lady with dark eyes, which she dropped shyly and slyly, and then caused to range boldly over the whole room. I

heard snortings and rustlings of contempt behind me, with the word "brazen" borne to my ears distinctly, accompaniments which increased as the lady would now decline the amorous advances of "Pathrick, asthore," now encourage them, now appear ready to sink with confusion, as with the successful effrontry of his countrymen, the lover pushed his advantages. Now she began to pout, now to push him away with a musical indignation which we could see was only simulated. The party behind showed how disgusted they were. "Without shame," were the words used. But now a change came o'er her face; she grew pensive :

O mother I'll cry,
O mother I'll die,
If Pathrick, asthore,
Should come here no more !

But there was no need of this protest, for in came Paddy himself, more forward and unpolite than ever. And she exclaimed at the last time of the recurring burden :

"Go away, ah do,
I begin to hate you."
But the impudent fellow,
As though he'd grown mellow,
Said "Here's hit or miss,"
And gave me—well *this* !
Provoking Paddy, asthore !

So arch was the pantomime with which the forward Paddy's compliment was conveyed that it completely took the audience by storm, all save the hostile detachment immediately behind, whose snortings and champings of impatience, disgust, and even anger, were loud enough for a whole squadron of cavalry. "Minx !" "Such an exhibition !" "Brazen creature !" "Well, I never !" were some of the depreciatory remarks I again heard, which convinced me that in this line of business this young lady bore away all suffrages, and had completely extinguished her rival. I trembled when I thought of the competition at the next reading, when the sense of competition would probably lead the first young lady into a display of pantomimic love-making that would scandalise the decorous.

The next postulant was the famous Mr. Hornblower, whom I heard spoken of with jocular interest as "Jack." He was a tall, heavy young man, who appeared with a familiar smile on his face, as though he well knew his power over all hearts, a confidence which was, indeed, presently justified, as, with a simple glance of humour, while the symphony was playing, he threw us all into convulsions of laughter. This power contrasted forcibly with the rather

tentative efforts of his companions, who were timorous and insecure as to the result of their efforts: while he, on the contrary, had a calm and undisturbed command over his resources, and the temper of his audience, which must have been the envy of the others. Nor did his performance belie this promise. He sang a melody descriptive of the career of "a VERY big man," everything about this gentleman being "very big;" and when he alluded to this person's marriage with "a very big wife," the ceiling of the Mopetown Rooms rang again and again with screams of convulsive laughter, which I doubt if the late Mr. Liston, or the present Mr. Toole, ever succeeded in rivalling. Between the verses, as he walked round on his toes, and hitched up his shoulders, some of the young ladies grew hysterical in their enjoyment, and tears flowed from the eyes of stout gentlemen. But curious to say, I observed precisely the same phenomenon as I had done in the case of the soi-disant flame of "Pathrick, asthore," namely, a family who preserved an almost cataleptic rigidity at the exertions of the humorist. In vain he postured and grimaced, they looked on with a stony attention. The son of that house, for so I conjectured him to be, whispered now and again to his mother, so I conjectured her to be, and from his face I could have sworn he was saying, "Miserable exhibition ! How a man could so degrade himself ! A positive buffoon !" I later gathered there was another artist in the same line, who answered the description of this young man.

But I must not linger too long, for the night is wearing on apace. The most interesting feature of the evening, as I should have supposed, was to conclude the performance. The "popular secretary," as I knew the Mopetown prints were certain to style him, had kept a *bonne bouche* for these last nights of the series, a little reading of his own. He did not (I was sure) set up to have the broad humour of his other friends; nor had any pretension to be one of your public performers. But still, in a small way, he had a "quiet fun" of his own; as, indeed, those who enjoyed his friendship in the domestic privacy could testify. Mr. Cleaver had very little voice, and gave us the well-known Trial in Pickwick. His voice was so small and husky, that after about a quarter of an hour's progress, the genuine penny folk in the distance began to grow impatient, and a navvy who had strayed in, perhaps taking it for

some inverted shape of "free and easy," called out with profane irreverence, "Speak oop, mon!" The disrespect of this address made a spasm pass over the form of the reader, while a shiver, attended with almost regimental turning of heads, affected the audience. The navy, leaning on his elbows, only grinned. Mr. Cleaver could treat such an interruption with contempt; and as this did not help to raise his voice, the example of the navy became presently contagious, and demoralised the people about him, who began to make a tramping noise with their heels, which entertained them more than the reading itself. Mr. Cleaver turned very red; he was just coming to Sam Weller's examination, where, as the friends of domestic privacy assured him, he was matchless. He said, in a trembling voice:

"I think this interruption very improper and uncalled for, after all the trouble I have taken. This is a reading which—*which—*—"

A voice, the owner of which has never been known to this hour—though it is suspected he was hired to interrupt—here finished the sentence, "*which ain't worth listening to.*"

A ghastly silence followed. Mr. Cleaver was regarded with a fetish-like worship. He was white with rage at the indecent interruption. He could only murmur something about "sending for the constable." I am told the subject furnished matter of conversation for days after I had quitted Mopetown.

Such was the Mopetown Reading at which I had the honour to assist. Readers who will search their memories will surely find that it seems familiar, and will stir up memories of other similar entertainments. There is a strong family likeness in all Penny Readings.

WASTED PRESENTIMENTS.

EVERYBODY likes a good ghost story; and still more popular, perhaps, are those quasi-supernatural histories which treat of presentiments realised, of dreams fulfilled, of words lightly spoken, but carried out in a manner that the speaker little expected. A list of such stories is at everybody's fingers' ends; but it has been my lot to meet with several instances of another class of stories, much less frequently commented on, but to my mind even more curious; cases, I mean, in which a peculiar warning has

been—all but, and yet not quite—borne out by subsequent events; so that the intimation could not be passed over as altogether trivial, and yet missed its mark. Several such occurrences have been related to me by witnesses in whose testimony I have full confidence, and I will proceed to give them without further preface.

Doctor J., a retired physician in delicate health, resided, some years ago, in one of the principal towns in the West of England. He was one night seized suddenly with violent illness, and within an hour or two was pronounced to be in a hopeless state. Doctor J. being a Roman Catholic, the Reverend Doctor V., a priest of that communion, was sent for to administer the last rites of religion; and, soon finding that his presence could be of no further use to the unconscious sufferer, he bethought himself how he could best procure female companionship for the poor wife, who was quite stunned by the sudden blow. With this intention, he hastened, in the early morning, to the house of an excellent elderly lady, a pious member of his congregation, and a friend of Mrs. J. The lady had not yet left her room, and he simply sent up word that he wished to speak to her. In a few moments she came hurrying into the room, with every appearance of agitation, and, before he could explain his sad errand, she seized his hand, breathlessly exclaiming: "Oh, Doctor V., how thankful I am to see you! I have had the most frightful, vivid dream about Doctor and Mrs. J.!" Doctor V. might well start, but she hurried on. "I dreamed that I went to call at their house, and that Mrs. J. came down to meet me in a widow's cap, with her face all swollen with tears, and she said to me: 'Oh! Mrs. M., my dear husband is just dead; and he desired me to say that you will be the next.'" "And how did you tell her?" Doctor V.'s auditors were won't to ask at this part of the narration; to which the reverend gentleman invariably answered, "I dare say it was very cowardly, and I dare say it was very foolish; but I did not tell her at all: I bolted!"

So far the story is like many another tale of the marvellous, but the usual sequel is wanting; for though Doctor J. died, Mrs. M. lived on for many years; and certainly was not "the next," unless in some mysterious sense confined to the world of spirits.

In the early days of our New Zealand colony, Mr. P., a youngson of an English peer, settled there with his family. Having hurt his arm, he was advised to try rest and change of air, and accordingly he set out for a trip to the other island, leaving his young wife, whose numerous and constantly increasing nursery duties kept her at home. The time fixed for his return was drawing near, when Mrs. P. was one night awakened by a scream from her eldest child, a little girl four or five years old, who was sleeping in the same bed with her mother. The child had awakened suddenly in a paroxysm of terror, and for some time no soothings were of any avail: all she would do was to point persistently to one corner of the room, while she sobbed out, "Oh! poor papa! poor papa! all dripping with water! all dripping with water!" Of course she was first petted and then laughed at, scolded for a silly little girl, and assured that papa could not possibly have been there; but when Mrs. P. reflected that her husband was probably at that moment on the sea, it is not to be wondered at that she felt her heart grow sick with anxiety. A few days later, as she and her children were sitting down to their breakfast, she saw one of their few neighbours riding up to the door. That he should have come away from his home in the busy morning hours betokened something unusual, and no sooner had she looked in his face than she exclaimed: "Tell me at once, my husband is drowned!" "How did you know?" he responded, thus confirming her fears; and he handed to her a copy of a local newspaper, in which she read that the steamer by which her husband had intended to return, had foundered at sea. The date tallied with her child's dream, and that circumstance seemed to her conclusive; so that when her friend tried to point out to her that there was no proof of her husband's death, she only answered that she had received a fearful warning, and gave herself up to her sorrow. At the end of a few days, Mr. P. quietly walked in, and was a good deal astonished at the agony of almost terrified joy with which his arrival was greeted. It was by the merest chance that he had not been in the lost vessel; he had taken his passage, and had actually gone on board, when he was struck with the extreme lowness of the bulwarks, and thought that, should there be bad weather, he, with his still helpless arm, might be in some danger of being washed

overboard. He therefore returned to the shore, and arranged to come by the next ship instead. So there the story ends, except that we will hope no time was lost in administering a dose of physio to the troublesome little dreamer.

The next story, perhaps, ought hardly to be placed in the same category with the others, since it is possible that the warning may have prevented its own fulfilment.

My great-grandmother was an active Lady Bountiful to a very rustic country population, over whose affairs, temporal and spiritual, she exercised a benevolent, if slightly tyrannical, sway. Among her most frequent pensioners was Soft Billy, as he was called, a poor, half-witted lad, generally quite harmless, but subject to occasional fits of temper, in which he was hard to deal with. One night she dreamed that she was walking along a lane in the neighbourhood, when, from a gap in the hedge, Soft Billy suddenly jumped down into the path before her, brandishing a reaping-hook. His flaming eyes and distorted face showed that his "dark hour" was upon him, and in another second he had flown at her, his fingers were gripping her throat with deadly strength, the steel flashed before her eyes, the very bitterness of death was rushing over her, and she awoke; awoke quivering all over, the cold perspiration standing on her forehead, and her heart beating to suffocation. It was long before she could force herself to meet Soft Billy, even in the presence of others, and for months she avoided the lane which she had traversed in her dream. At last, some sudden case of distress in the village called for her presence, some sick child was to be physicked, or some wife-beating husband to be brought to book, and my great-grandmother set forth, never recollecting, till she had gone some distance, that she must inevitably pass through the dreaded lane. On she went, laughing at her own fears, till suddenly she saw before her the very gap which had appeared in her dream, and which she had never noticed before, and, at that moment, from that very gap, down jumped Soft Billy, and in his hand he brandished a reaping-hook. The dream, in all its horrors, seemed on the verge of fulfilment; but my great-grandmother was a strong-minded woman, and, though her heart was throbbing with terror, she neither fainted nor screamed; she walked straight up to the idiot, and gave him a kindly greeting. "I am glad

to see you, Billy; I am walking to the end of the lane, and now you shall take care of me." The lad, highly flattered, was meek and amiable in a moment, and they walked the rest of the way together, she keeping up an incessant chatter in her most cheery tones, though her heart was doubtless beating at every swing of the ungainly figure, and every flourish of the deadly weapon in the poor, purposeless fingers. At the cottage door she thanked him, and wished him good-bye; and it will readily be believed that she procured another escort for her walk home.

Now for my last story, which I had from the lips of a venerable old Presbyterian minister, the last man to indulge his imagination.

He was in the habit of going every Sunday afternoon to conduct the worship at a little village on the coast of Scotland. One Saturday night he dreamed a vivid dream. He saw the village, and the bay, the waves tossing and beating in a storm, and he saw a pleasure-boat upset, and dashed to pieces against the rocks. Two men were buffeting with the water, fighting for their lives; one a fair, slight youth, the other a middle-aged sailor. As the dreamer looked, he saw them both clutch at, and cling to, a floating spar; it swayed and sank under the double weight, and, while the thought passed through his mind, "it can never support them both," he saw the sailor deliberately raise his fist and strike his companion a blow which stunned him. The young man loosed his hold, and, as he sank into the sea, the sleeper awoke. A few Sundays afterwards he was greeted with the news that a pleasure-boat had been upset, that the body of a young English traveller had been washed on shore, and that an elderly seaman was the only survivor. The man was a good deal injured, and was in bed at a public-house, to which the corpse of the poor young traveller had also been conveyed. The minister at once begged to be taken thither, and so strongly was he impressed with the conviction that his dream had had a literal fulfilment, that he entered the room of the sick man with the fullest intention of taxing him with murder. But when he approached the bed he saw a face totally unlike the one which had haunted his sleep, and every feature of which was vividly impressed on his memory. His visit to the poor dead youth had a like result.

These stories are actual facts, for the

truth of which I can vouch. I will leave all speculations on the subject to those who read them.

GEOFFREY LUTTRELL'S NARRATIVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "IN THAT STATE OF LIFE," &c.

IN ELEVEN CHAPTERS. CHAPTER VIII.

A WEEK and then a fortnight passed, without any other letter from Assunta. Mr. Walbrooke had written twice, in a calm and forbearing manner considering the provocations he received, and had invited Harry to the Grange; but this had only elicited a flat refusal. The poor fellow was now under the impression that his letter to Assunta had never been forwarded, but destroyed by his uncle, and he tried in vain, through various channels, to learn her address. It was clear to me that she herself had taken every precaution to prevent his tracing her; but he would not see it in this light. I then wrote to her myself, begging her to let me have a line—if she had bound herself by any promise not to write again to Harry—to say if she had received his letter. This I thought it best to enclose to Mr. Walbrooke (who knew of my correspondence with Assunta), begging him to forward it to Miss Fleming. I received a few lines from him, replying that he had done as I requested, feeling sure that I had Harry's interests too much at heart to plead for this insane boy with the young lady, who, having as much good sense as right feeling, had resolved to break off all communication with him. And, in the course of another week, I heard from Assunta herself. The note was without date; short and sad enough, though there was a very evident effort to make it appear otherwise. She had received Harry's letter. She could not write to him; perhaps it was better that she should not write to any one much just at present. She grieved to hear from Mr. Walbrooke that Harry refused to go to the Grange. The thing that would make her happiest now was to know of a complete reconciliation between him and his uncle. As to his entering the wine trade, perhaps she had no longer any right to express an opinion, or offer her advice, but she could not help begging him to pause before he took a step which she dreaded might prove prejudicial to him in all ways. She was very busy, and constant occupation was, no doubt, the best thing for her. She hoped that Harry would not try and track her to her present home, as it would only distress her to no purpose.

I read this, as it was plainly meant I should, to him whom it chiefly concerned. The only effect it produced was to inflame him yet further against his uncle. The poor boy alternated now between fits of profound depression and storms of passion, which, while they lasted, rendered him absolutely ungovernable. And yet, to my surprise, I found that he made efforts of which I believe no one who has not that thirst in the blood can estimate the cost, to subdue the wild craving for drink which seized him whenever he felt especially wretched. So far as I know, for more than two months, he never once exceeded, and this first led me to hope, with a certain amount of confidence, that, under favourable circumstances, my poor friend might yet overcome his fatal tendencies. He was now, nominally, in Mr. Strahan's house; and had he been required to do desk work, he might perhaps have applied himself; but for the particular duty required of him—that of going up and down the world preaching the faith in Strahan's sherry—he was at present wholly unfit; and his employer must have found him an unprofitable servant. His thoughts were never absent from one subject; he wandered through the streets, looking gloomy or ferocious as he was in the humour, and if he met a friend, and tried to blow Strahan's trumpet in a few minor chords, the effect was only to make the man hurry away, muttering, "Good Heavens! How changed that fellow is! He was the jolliest chap I ever knew at Trinity." The advocacy of gay, jovial Harry Walbrooke would have met with eminent success, as I doubt not the astute wine-merchant had calculated; but this same youth, transformed into a sad, stern man, proved but an indifferent huckster of the wares he was paid to dispose of. The only satisfaction which Harry got out of the business was, I am afraid, the knowledge that he was doing something eminently annoying to his uncle. No communication had passed between them for some weeks. Lena wrote, much to our surprise, that Mr. Walbrooke was absent from home; he had not been away half a dozen times in the last ten years. I had a latent apprehension that he had gone to resuscitate his interest, to Harry's detriment, in some long-neglected nephews in the north. But it was not so.

One evening in June—I remember it as if it were yesterday—I sat alone at my open window. In the distance there was the roar of the mighty city, lessening hour by hour. Above me the broad arms of night raised themselves to embrace the few

gold-haired children of the sky who yet lingered there. And evoked by that image of the end which comes to hush and darken all, in my heart arose the oft-recurring question, How shall it be after this life is ended? Shall there be a dawn where the love, the fidelity, which remain unknown till darkness comes to swallow the loving and unloved alike, shall blossom and bear fruit? Such questions trouble me no more, thank God, for the time is now near at hand when I shall know all.

I was interrupted by the entrance of the maid-servant, who announced a gentleman, and I recognised in the twilight Mr. Walbrooke.

"I am in London for only a few hours," he began, "and as all communication between my hopeful nephew and myself is at an end for the present, I wish you to give him a piece of intelligence, Luttrell. Miss Fleming is to be married to Mr. Ridgway, of Hapsbury, next week. This, I hope, will bring him to his senses."

"God help him!" I groaned. "Oh, Mr. Walbrooke, may you never have reason to repent this bitterly!"

The squire gave me a look of offended surprise. "Why so, pray? Not on Harry's account, I conclude? Nothing but this would cure him of his folly. He himself wrote to me as much. And as to Miss Fleming——"

"She will be miserable!" I interrupted, with a vehemence which must have contrasted strangely in the squire's ears with my usually mild utterances. "She has consented to this self-sacrifice from a mistaken sense of her duty to Harry—and to you, Mr. Walbrooke, and perhaps, also, to Mrs. Fleming, who is in great poverty."

"Mrs. Fleming did, I am glad to say, second me very strongly, and therein showed her good sense," said the squire, with a dogged sententiousness. "It would have been flying in the face of Providence for a girl in Miss Fleming's position to persist in rejecting an offer of such exceptional brilliancy. She might wait long enough before she got such another."

"Better wait all her life—better wear her fingers to the bone! No blessing ever yet came upon a marriage where there was no love, and there is no love here upon either side."

"You have no right whatever to assume that," and a red spot rose upon the squire's cheek. "Mr. Ridgway has, I am sure, a very sincere affection for the girl. In fact, he has proved it by his pertinacity. He has renewed his proposal three times."

"Yes," I cried, "because he thinks the world will condone his past offences when he is married, especially when married to so charming a creature."

"I am surprised that you should lend an ear to such miserable scandal," he rejoined; but there was more of annoyance than conviction in his tone.

"I don't lend an ear, in the sense of believing it, Mr. Walbrooke; but you cannot deny that it exists, nor can you, I suspect, deny that this is one of the chief causes of Mr. Ridgway's pertinacity; this, and the fact that his vanity would suffer at being rejected by a poor governess, after proclaiming his admiration so openly as he did."

"I don't say that that may not have something to do with it," said the squire, with the air of a man who magnanimously concedes more than he need; "but I do say that Ridgway, with all his cleverness, and with such a fortune and place, might have married any one. Few dukes' daughters would have refused him; and I think it shows that he has a real—a—affection for Miss Fleming to have selected her."

"It only shows that he has that for which he has always been renowned, good taste. But I am not thinking of him, but of her, Mr. Walbrooke. Were he ever so much in love that would make no difference in the fact that her heart is entirely Harry's."

"Pshaw! All boys and girls who live in the same house fancy themselves in love. Harry happens to be more obstinate than most boys, that is all."

"So I am afraid you will find."

"He has chosen to become bagman to a wine merchant, with the intention of frightening me into concession, I suppose; but he will find himself mistaken. As long as he continues to disgrace my name I can have nothing to say to him; so you may tell him, Luttrell. But this marriage will, I hope, open his eyes, and make him see the utter folly of his conduct."

I shook my head. "Is Miss Fleming's present residence still a secret, Mr. Walbrooke?"

"No; indeed, she asked me to beg you to go down and see her, if you were able, any day this week. They are living in a cottage near Waltham, where Mrs. Fleming's mother resides. You understand, of course, that this information is for you, not for Harry. I asked her whether she would wish to see him, and she said 'on no account.'"

The squire shortly after this left me. I resolved not to tell Harry the fatal news until I had had an interview with Assunta;

and, accordingly, the next morning saw me on the top of the coach, which started on its short journey at an early hour. I had no difficulty in finding Mrs. Fleming's humble dwelling, which was less a cottage than the dejected offshoot of a street, with a pretence at gentility, and a reality of hideous gloom. It stood at the end of a small wilderness of unfinished buildings of scarlet brick. The house itself was of the same material, with a bright green door, and brass knocker; it had no garden, no pleasant out-look, only the white dust of the road, and the hot glare of the surrounding houses. The door was opened to me by a little maid-of-all-work, of about fifteen, and she showed me into a room some twelve feet square, where sat Mrs. Fleming, Assunta, and three very red-faced children, at their early dinner. They were all in deep mourning, of course, and looked oppressed by the heat. The window was open, yet the room was, indeed, oppressive, partly owing to the fumes of an Irish stew, which hung about the dingy curtains, and mud-coloured paper, and the six horse-hair chairs. It is puerile to dwell on these details, and I know they heightened the sense of discomfort, and the contrast with all I had hitherto seen Assunta surrounded by. She rose, held out her hand, and introduced me to Mrs. Fleming, a silly-looking woman, who had once been pretty, no doubt, but whose face now, with its little pointed, red nose, was very unattractive. Sad it was, certainly, and sorrow generally interests me, but there was nothing sacred in the expression of this grief. It had taken sharp and querulous lines that played round the corners of the mouth; and she indulged in frequent "suspensions of the breath" in her flatulent discourse, which aggravated me. Assunta herself looked pale and worn. The children, two of whom were very young, were fed by her, and seemed to look to her, rather than to their mother, for everything, except constant scolding, wherein the poor lady evidently thought her maternal duty chiefly lay. When Assunta had given the children their rice pudding:

"I will now take Mr. Luttrell into the next room, dear mother," she said.

"As you please, my dear. Tommy, take your fingers out of your plate directly, and look what a mess you've made of your pinafore!"

I closed the door upon Mrs. Fleming's maternal strictures, and followed Assunta into the sitting-room on the opposite side of the passage, which was the counterpart

of the parlour, except for the addition of a horse-hair sofa, and the substitution of a coloured for a white cloth upon the table, on which were a Bible, a prayer-book, a work-basket, and some half-made frocks.

She sat down, and looked intently into my face. "How is Harry? How did he take the news?"

"He doesn't yet know it. I wanted to see you first. I wanted to know from your own lips that—that you had definitely made up your mind to this before I told him."

"I have definitely made up my mind," she said, in a low voice.

"And you have no misgiving? Forgive me for saying this, but if I may plead the privilege of an old friend——"

"You may, and I shall thank you; but I have weighed everything, dear Mr. Luttrell, and the result is—I have given my word to Mr. Ridgway. When I had once brought my mind to see that I must give up Harry, nothing that could happen to me signified much, and it seems to me the best thing for every one, except myself. If you knew all——" Here she sighed, and hesitated for a moment.

"I don't require to know all to be very sure that it cannot be right to sacrifice yourself thus."

"Oh, I had already done that," she said, shaking her head. "This is hardly to be called a sacrifice. I had certainly rather have worked for my daily bread if I had only had myself to think of; but I never disliked Mr. Ridgway, and he has behaved so nobly about poor Mrs. Fleming, that I feel deeply grateful to him. If my marrying him can make him happy——"

An impatient exclamation, I am afraid, burst from me, but I checked what I was about to say, and changed it to:

"Mr. Walbrooke, of course, it is who has brought this about? He was bent upon it from the very first."

"He would not have succeeded but for two things. First, Harry's insane letters to his uncle. I saw from them very plainly that he would continue to pursue this fatal scheme of his, and remain at open war with the squire as long as I remained unmarried. He said so; and, on some points, he has all the Walbrooke tenacity of purpose. Ah, if he only had it in all!"

"He has been battling manfully with temptation during the past three months," I said.

"Has he?" she rejoined, eagerly. "How thankful I am."

"And the other thing?" I asked. "What was that?"

She was silent for a moment.

"Not even Mr. Walbrooke knows; but I will tell you. Poor Mr. Fleming died terribly in debt, far more so than we had any idea of at first. After everything was sold, there was still a large deficit. Mr. Walbrooke was very kind, as you know, but what he gave me only went to relieve Mrs. Fleming's immediate necessities, and I could not have applied to him again. Of course you are aware that Mr. Fleming and his wife brought me up out of charity, that I am indebted to them for everything I have ever had? When Mr. Ridgway offered to settle four hundred a year upon my adopted mother, and she, poor soul! went down on her knees to implore me not to reject this maintenance for her, urging, very justly, that thus only could I repay all that her husband and she had done for me, how could I refuse? What possible means had I of extricating her from her troubles but this? I might get eighty or a hundred a year as a governess, if I had great luck, and send her sixty or seventy out of it—that was the utmost I could look forward to doing for her and these penniless children. As I have already said, my sacrifice was made—to ratify it thus was not so hard, and it seemed to be my duty."

"I can't think so, and I can't forgive Mrs. Fleming——" I began, warmly, when the door opened, and the widow entered, followed by her children. Assunta took up one of the frocks from the table, and Mrs. Fleming another, and both began stitching assiduously.

"I suppose Assunta has told you all about her prospects?" said the widow. "It is the most wonderful piece of luck, as Mr. Walbrooke says. If poor Mr. Fleming could only have lived to see it! Ah, dear! (Sammy, leave that thimble alone.) Yes, when I think of the day we found her, nearly twenty-one years ago now (Jane, will you sit still, once for all?), I little thought she would live to be a great lady—the sickliest-looking baby I ever saw—a great contrast to all mine, even the three I lost; ah, dear! they weren't so puny. I have had plenty of trouble, Mr. Luttrell. Some people are born to trouble, just as others are born to luck, like Assunta. To be left with four children, as I am! Ah, dear!"

I felt that I could not talk to this woman, and turned to ask Assunta where she was to be married. Mrs. Fleming answered for her.

"Here, I am sorry to say. Mr. Walbrooke asked us to go to the Grange for it, which would have been much nicer, but

Assunta wouldn't. She didn't consult my feelings, nor how poor Mr. Fleming would have felt, had he been alive, at having to receive Mr. Ridgway in such a house as this. (Tommy, get down off that chair this minute, sir. My dear, reach me your scissors.) No, it is very humiliating, after being accustomed to one's own plate as I always have, and such beautiful table-linen, for poor Mr. Fleming liked everything nice, and such books as he had; all sold, with every stick of furniture in the house (Jane, if you can't sit still you must go out of the room), and then to come down to pewter, with Mr. Ridgway's elegance, too. Ah, dear, dear!"

"There is no disgrace in poverty, mother, and Mr. Ridgway is too truly a gentleman for you to worry about such things."

Still Mrs. Fleming ran on for another half-hour a Jeremiad over her various losses; her husband, her own health, and her piano, her Brussels carpets, her three dead children, and her Worcester china, all very much in the same tone, interspersed with sundry moral fillips to Tommy, Jane, and Sammy, as irritating to the tempers of those poor little animals as the constant twitches of a heavy-handed driver are to his horses' mouths. And Assunta—what a life must hers have been during these past three months! What a sore addition to her other trials, the blister of this foolish woman's tongue!

By-and-bye I looked at my watch, and seeing that it wanted but a quarter of an hour to the time when the coach was to start, I made bold to ask if Assunta would walk part of the way to the inn with me; for it was my only chance of getting another word alone with her. She ran and put on her bonnet.

As soon as we were in the street, "You will understand, I am sure," she said, "why I couldn't go to the Grange. Poor Mrs. Fleming thinks it is my pride, and I cannot undeceive her. There are two things I have not strength and courage for—to revisit the place where I was so exquisitely happy, and to see Harry again."

"Have you any message to him?" I asked, after a pause.

"Tell him not to think too hardly of me, that is all. What I have done has been because I believed it to be for his good."

"I hope it may prove so, but I doubt it."

I should not be a friend to you both if I withheld from you my belief that you are utterly wrong. I see the force of all your arguments for this marriage, but you cannot make black white. And Harry will not see it as white: don't deceive yourself."

We were crossing one of the streams that intersect the town. She stopped for a minute, as if transfixed by some agonising thought, and leaned on the little wooden parapet of the bridge, looking over into the water, so that I could not see her face. Presently she raised it and said:

"He is young, he will get over his grief; and by-and-bye, in the course of time, he will find some woman who loves him nearly as well, perhaps, as I do, and whom he can love, and whose influence over him is greater than mine has been. In the mean time, Mr. Luttrell, there will be this immediate good. He and his uncle will be reconciled."

I thought differently; but it would have been cruel to harass her mind further by raising doubts on this point. She had resolved to immolate herself. I felt myself powerless to prevent the consummation of this mistaken self-sacrifice, and having once spoken, what right had I to add to her misery, poor child! by painful and fruitless discussion?

I heard the guard wind his horn: and taking her hand within mine, I murmured:

"May it all turn out as you expect. God bless you! Mr. Ridgway has bought a pearl of great price, if he knows how to value it. May you at least find peace in your new home!"

And so we parted on that little bridge; and I left behind me the brightest, the best, the dearest vision of my youth. When we next met, that vision had become a sad reality among the stern, hard truths of middle life.

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